



## **STEINBERG, PARENTS, ADVOCATES RALLY TO URGE GOVERNOR TO SIGN LANDMARK AUTISM INSURANCE COVERAGE BILL**

September 26, 2011

Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from across the state rallied in Sacramento today to celebrate legislation authored by Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) which would end the discriminatory practice of health insurance plans denying coverage of medical treatments and therapies for those with autism.

SB 946, now awaiting action from Governor Brown, requires private health plans and insurance companies to provide coverage of behavioral health treatment for individuals with autism or pervasive developmental disorders.

"Insurance companies can no longer promise one thing and then set up every possible road block to prevent it," Steinberg said. "Thousands of California families have been forced to pay out-of-pocket or rely on taxpayer-funded programs for behavioral health treatments, which can cost \$50,000 a year or more."

The bill, sponsored by the Alliance of California Autism Organizations, Autism Speaks, Special Needs Network, and The Help Group, also defines the scope of these treatments and establishes appropriate guidelines and standards for individuals, groups, and entities designated as appropriate providers for these services. Because autism affects people of all ages and the level of treatment varies for each person, the legislation puts no caps or limits on the recipients' age or the amount and types of services covered.

Areva Martin, mother of a son with ASD and President of the Special Needs Network (SNN), emceed the event. "As an advocate and a parent of a child on the spectrum, I know first-hand that this bill is a game changer for special needs children across the state, such as those in underserved communities throughout Los Angeles, whom SNN proudly serves and represents," Martin said. "By granting our children access to behavioral therapies, SB 946 will give them the opportunity to reach their full potential, putting them closer to equal standing with their typically-developing peers."

Kristin Jacobson, a founding member of the Alliance of California Autism Organizations, noted that the bill can help provide relief to our state's recurring budget crisis. "The bill does not impose any significant costs to the state's general fund. Requiring private health plans and insurers to assume their fair share of the burden will save state agencies like regional centers and school districts hundreds of millions of dollars. Further, early intervention treatments can substantially increase a child's independence which will reduce future taxpayer costs for special education and social services," Jacobson said.

Shelley Hendrix, the Director of Grassroots Development for Autism Speaks, indicated that 27 other states have already mandated autism behavioral health therapy and that the premium impacts to subscribers have been proven to be as minimal as pennies per month. Ms. Hendrix added, "Early intervention not only saves lives, but can also reduce the national fiscal impact of the autism epidemic, which is currently estimated to exceed \$35 billion annually and is expected to more than double in the next decade alone."

Family support groups from throughout the state travelled to Sacramento to attend the rally. Information tables were set up to educate attendees on the various services available to them.

The bill follows through on work the Pro Tem has done as Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Autism and Related Disorders and as Chair of the Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism.